

Maltese History Featured on Its 2014 Issues

Malta—which includes sister islands Gozo and Comino—is situated in the Mediterranean Sea, 60 miles south of Sicily. With a history spanning over 7,000 years, and at the crossroads of strategic maritime routes, Malta has been a home, stronghold, trading post and refuge to many civilizations.

The islands are a melting pot of cultures: Neolithic temple builders, seafaring Phoenicians, the traveller Apostle Paul, the Knights of St. John, Napoleon and the British royalty, all have left their indelible mark. Malta is now an independent sovereign nation and a member of both the European Union and the British Commonwealth.

Malta's philatelic history goes back to 1860 and, with access to such a rich source of material, Maltese stamps are renowned around the world for their unique depiction of a wide variety of relevant themes. From the very beginning, Malta's stamps have been popular with collectors, and recent issues have added to their popularity.

Maltex 2014

On October 17, MaltaPost celebrated its participation in the Maltex Philatelic Exhibition 2014, which had been organized by the Malta Philatelic Society. For this event, in addition to the single shown above the Philatelic Bureau issued an Occasion Card, Postal Card, and Personalized Stamp/Cover.

The Occasion Card shows a flower found in the Maltese countryside 'The Field Gladiolus' from the Maltese Flora set issued in June, the Postal Card depicts the bagpipe and drum musicians performing at Valletta's Porta Reale from the set the EUROPA 2014 National Music Instruments set, and the Personalized Cover features the Maltex Logo, shown above.

World War I

MaltaPost also joined in the commemoration of the World War I Centenary on November 7 with a set of three stamps. Malta



was justly described as the Nurse of the Mediterranean during WW I, and the stamps employ that theme. In all 27 hospitals and camps were set up. The first group of 600 casualties from the Gallipoli landings arrived on May 4,

1915, with the wounded men taken first to Valletta's ancient Sacra Infirmaria hospital. Built by the Knights of St John in the sixteenth century, it has one of the longest wards or halls in Europe, and can still be visited today. From there the wounded were sorted and moved on to the other hospitals around the island.

In the years that followed the number of sick and wounded treated in Malta from May 1915 up to February 1919 was approximately

58,000 from the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, and 78,000, from the Salonika Expeditionary Force. Not all patients survived and many are buried in Malta's Pieta Military Cemetery.

In addition to victims of war, in July 1916 an outbreak of malaria in Macedonia brought more sick to Malta.

The Sovereign Military Order of Malta (1530-1798)

Malta's history of caring precedes World War I, and traces in part to the work of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta.

In 1523 the Sovereign Military Order of St. John of Jerusalem and Rhodes was forced to leave Rhodes after six months of fierce fighting against the army of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent. After a few years without its own territory, Malta was granted to the Order by Emperor Charles V with the approval of Pope Clement VII, and in 1530 Grand Master Fra' Philippe de Villiers de l'Isle Adam took possession of Malta.

In 1565, for more than three months, the knights led by Grand Master Fra' Jean de la Valette, successfully defended the Island against the Ottomans in what is recorded in history as the Great Siege of Malta. Following this victory, the knights built the city and port of Valletta and proceeded to transformed Malta's culture and landscape by undertaking numerous projects. The Order also built a large new hospital, which at the time, was considered to be among the best in the world. Malta's geographical position assisted the Order in its important maneuvers against the Ottoman fleet and North African pirates.

The knights left Malta in 1798 after surrendering to an invasion by the troops of Napoleon Bonaparte. Nowadays, the Order is active in over 120 countries, helping the poor and the suffering without distinction of color, creed or race. The mission of the Order is carried out worldwide by 13,500 knights and dames, 80,000 volunteers and over 25,000 employees, mainly medical personnel. Through its relief corps, Malteser International, the Order is also engaged in aiding



victims of natural disasters, epidemics and armed conflicts.

This extensive issue (one sheetlet shown), released on September 30, presents 28 Grandmasters. Most of the portraits are from "Histoire de l'Ordre de Malte", written by René Aubert de Vertot in the early 18th century, with the last five grandmasters being the work of artist Cedric Galea Pirotta—who also was on hand for Maltex 2014.

The stamps of Malta, as well as the issues of more than 20 other postal administrations offered at face value may be accessed at the World Online Philatelic Agency, <http://www.wopa-stamps.com/>.

Information also can be found at our Stamp News Now website page: <http://www.stampnewsnow.com/WOPA-NewIssues.html>.